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S E C R E T BAGHDAD 001383

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2018

TAGS: PGOV IZ

SUBJECT: PRT WASIT: BLOOD BAG DONATION FURTHERS SADRIST
ENGAGEMENT

REF: A. BAGHDAD 367

B. BAGHDAD 1040

Classified By: PRT TEAM LEADER ROB JONES FOR REASONS 1.4 (b and d).

11. (U) This is a PRT Wasit reporting cable.

12. (S) Summary: On May 1 the PRT provided 3,000 blood storage bags to the al Kut Blood Bank in central al Kut to respond to a crucial medical requirement and advance the PRT's Sadrist engagement strategy. The Bank Director, three PC members and PRT IPAO marked the event with a press conference at the Blood Bank. At the press conference, IPAO stressed the importance of security to current and future development and reconstruction work in Wasit, and underscored CF's willingness to assist the populace in the city's Sadrist-leaning areas once the neighborhoods are stabilized and security is established. End summary.

13. (S) Sadrist Trend PC member Ahmed Hussein Ebrah requested the blood bags as a "goodwill gesture" (reftel A) in a meeting with the PRT on March 1. Due to several factors, including JAM-sponsored violence in March and April in al Kut, the \$15,000 QRF project was not executed until May 1. While the blood bags address a pressing health need in Wasit, the primary reason for the donation was to emphasize the PRT's interest in building a relationship with local Sadrist Trend officials.

14. (U) The short press conference was covered by local television, radio, and print reporters. Attending Provincial Council (PC) members were Dr. Salwa Mohammed Ahmed (Islamic Action Organization), Meithum Eskander Mohammed (Da'wa), and Sa'ad Sharhan Farhan (Independent). Sa'ad Sharhan noted in his remarks that "actions like this are noticed and have a big impact on the al Kut population" and described the exchange as "continuing to build the close relationship between Iraq and the Coalition." Picking up on the security theme, he added, "We understand that when the security situation improves, aid improves." PC members Salwa and Meithum did not speak at the press conference.

15. (S/NF) Comment: The mechanics of the event went well, and, with the broad local press coverage, the blood bag donation was a clear public diplomacy win. As regards to the Sadrist Engagement Strategy, it would have been preferable had Ahmed Ebrah participated, although he had dropped hints that he would not attend in the days leading up the event. We suspect his absence was due to an inability to be seen publicly with the "occupiers" rather than any conflict with the PRT, as he called later in the day to apologize and extend his thanks. In comments to the press, IPAO did not acknowledge any collaboration with Ebrah, emphasizing instead the willingness of CF to work in Zuwarijat, Anwar, and Shudatra, all traditionally Sadrist-leaning al Kut neighborhoods. The PRT and 214 Fires Brigade are planning a May 3 release of three low-level Jaysh al-Mahdi detainees to the charge of two Sadrist Trend guarantors as a next step in

the engagement strategy (reftel B). End Comment.
CROCKER